

The Evolution of an Elementary Art Curriculum

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction.....	3-7
Chapter 2: Service Learning in Art Education.....	8-21
Chapter 3: Talking About Art.....	22-36
Chapter 4: Synthesis.....	37-42

Chapter 1: Introduction

I have always had a passion and love for the arts. When I was in kindergarten I took a personality test that determined what career path I should follow when I grew up, my result was painter.

While other children played at the park across the street from my home, I would sit for hours with play-doh, finish paint with water books, and doodle with crayons. I knew my calling was in the arts early on, but it was much later in life when I decided sharing my passion and love for the arts with students was what I needed to do.

I enrolled in Ohio Northern University with a double major in art and psychology. I wanted to work as an art therapist for Autistic children, but quickly realized psychology was not for me. I took an entry-level education course and participated in my first field experience in the Winter of '97. From the second I stepped into the classroom, I knew that was where I belonged. I needed to teach art, and I needed to do it in a way I was never taught.

During elementary school, my art class consisted of making simple crafts. In middle school, I received step-by-step instructions that resulted in the whole class having identical works of art. By high school, I had free reign of the art room with no direction resulting in a lack of any real art education. These were the same teaching styles I witnessed in most of my field experiences, as well as student teaching. I knew the students were capable of creating so much more than the meaningless projects they were throwing out as they left the room. I wondered why I didn't receive any instruction or guidance in creating meaningful, personal works of art until I entered college. I knew it was possible for students to express themselves through their art even as

kindergarteners.

As I began my teaching career in the fall of 2002, I decided I was going to teach my students with the same passion, dedication, and knowledge with which my college professors taught me. I took lessons I learned in college and adjusted them to fit the needs of my elementary students. I saw great results and knew this was the way to go. As time went by, I developed my own lessons and created a cumulative curriculum from the ground up that focused on all aspects of the arts. My students leave my classroom with knowledge of many artists, various techniques, and the history of art. They have created meaningful works of art and participated in the critique and analysis of both famous works of art and those of their peers. They participate in arts enriched service learning opportunities and create art for their community.

I currently work in the Liberty Union-Thurston school district. LU-T is a small district located to the south east of Columbus. The town of Baltimore, where the schools are located, is a small farming town with only one stop light. We are comprised of one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school. The average graduating class consists of around 100 students. The elementary school is a close-knit group of employees. Many teachers are relatives of students or grew up with their parents. The school environment is everything one would expect from a small town. People are friendly, everyone says hello and asks about your family. The teachers pray for each others families when someone is sick and have food/money collections when someone's family member passes. The employees truly care about each other and it shows in their actions. LU-T is a wonderful place to work and a place I would love to stay.

In the 2008-09 school year I taught k-4 and 6th grade art. My elementary classes met once a week for thirty-five minutes where as my middle school class met every day for forty five minutes throughout one semester. In the fall of 2009 my classes changed, I started teaching k-5 and was given forty-five minutes per class. This has been much better for my students and myself. The extra time has allowed my students exposure to more artists, longer discussions, and more uninterrupted time to concentrate on their works.

Liberty Union did not have an art teacher for thirty-five years until I was hired at in 2008. When I started teaching about artists and exposing the students to materials other than crayons and markers they were so excited. The students at LU-T craved the creativity that my class allowed. The only exposure to the arts that most of these students had prior to my class was the 20 minutes twice a week they had in music class, hardly enough to really get their creative juices flowing. Since I teach students from a small community most of my students have never been to an art museum or seen an original piece of art. It is wonderful to expose these children to a world they have never experienced.

I teach many types of lessons in my class, but have one personal favorite; my 6th grade stop motion animation lesson. For this project I have students break into groups and do everything a "real animator" would do such as, design their characters, write their story, sketch their movie set, draw story boards, create their movie set from provided and found materials, and create their characters out of clay. They have to work well with others, decide what role people are playing, and assign appropriate duties to each member of the group. I have the students do practice runs of their movies before they create their final project. The students really get into this

lesson. They always work better together during this lesson than they do at any other time of the year. Students have even spent their own money to buy materials to add to their movie sets such as cotton balls and glitter. That alone shows how much they truly care about the end result.

The students use a camera and tripod to take the photos or their movie. If at any time they want to look at their photos we simply upload them to iPhoto and flip through them like a flipbook giving the effect of movement. After they have taken all their photos I upload them to iMovie and place title screens, credits, and music on them. The students will do this in the future when a computer is purchased for my room with the appropriate software; however, since it is my personal computer being used I do this step for the students. When all the movies are done, each student receives a DVD containing the animations created in their class. On the final day of class we have a popcorn party and watch all the movies. The students clap for each other and congratulate the other students on a job well done. The movies the students created the 08-09 year were wonderful. The stories they told were funny and well thought out. The characters they created were well planned and looked fantastic, as well as their movie sets. The movies created ranged from 2 and a half minutes to 30 seconds but either way they were done with care. This is a lesson I will continue to do in the future.

I have made many fun and exciting changes in my classroom over the last few years. I have added more community involvement and critique. I have become much more flexible with my lessons and have started allowing the students to take part in the planning. If a student questions why I want something a certain way and has a different way he/she would like to try, I am very open to making changes in my lessons on the spot. My students have many choices in execution

of projects now and make many of the decisions involving subject matter in their pieces. I have given my students more control over their learning and have higher expectations to go along with it. My experiences with the OSU Art Education MA program have helped me see there was so much to teaching I was missing out on. My classroom was always a fun safe place for my students to learn about the arts and create artworks. Now it is that plus a place where they take ownership and responsibility for what they are learning, choose how they want to solve a problem, are involved in critical thinking, and learn to express themselves through art.

Chapter 2: Service Learning in Art Education

This paper outlines my first integration of service learning into an art curriculum. “Service-Learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities.” (National Service Learning Clearing House, 2011) Although I was quite resistant to idea of service learning in the arts, I learned the impact it has on students and how much they grow through the experience of helping others. I conducted a small focus group after my students created bandanas for local shelter cats and dogs to wear in order to see how the students felt about the experience. Not only did the students truly enjoy themselves, I learned this simple three class project inspired my students to want to create much more art to help others.

The Setting

Liberty Union Elementary is a part of the Liberty Union-Thurston Local School District, which is comprised of 3 schools; one High School, Middle School, and Elementary. Our schools are located in the 1.8 square mile village of Baltimore, Ohio about 30 miles South East of Columbus, surrounded by farms and open fields. As of the Census of 2000, there were 2,881 people, 1,159 households, and 786 families residing in the village. The racial makeup of the village at that time was 98.96% White/Caucasian. (United States Census Bureau) Baltimore is what many people picture a small town to be, where everyone knows each other and says hello. There is one main street that runs through the heart of the town with one stoplight right in

the center. There is one pharmacy, post office, library, pool, gas station, a Subway, and a smattering of local businesses. There is a local pizza shop owned by the mother of a teacher, wife of a school board member, and mother in law to a local firefighter; this a typical Baltimore family. In 2008 Liberty Union Elementary decided to hire their first art teacher in over 35 years, I was lucky enough to be chosen for this position. Most all of the teachers hired into the schools grew up in town and graduated from Liberty Union High School; there are only a few of us outsiders.

Liberty Union Elementary is a wonderful school and a fantastic place to work. We have over 620 students from pre-school through grade 5, and 60 staff members. Our mission is “to provide an environment that encourages life long learning by working together to accomplish goals.” All the teachers use Baldrige tools to enhance learning, help students become more independent, and accountable for their work. Our PEACE (character education) program teaches students to “Practice Empathy And Compassion Everyday.” (Brownfield, 2010)

My art class is meant to be a safe and creative place for the students to go where they can express their feelings and emotions in a positive way while creating meaningful art pieces. In my class we learn about famous artists, the history of art, and reasons for creating art. I also teach the technical uses of various materials, how to analyze and respond to art, and many other things. I have developed LU-T’s elementary art curriculum from the ground up and have recently added service learning and community involvement into the program.

During the fall of 2010 I took a class at OSU where I had to create a service-learning project for my students. I moaned and groaned about this to everyone. “How am I going to do this, how is this something for an art curriculum, how, why, how.” I dreaded the thought of this project. That was until I started to read about service learning within the arts. “Within the context of education, both service learning and arts education contribute to youth and community development in unique ways. Service learning fosters principles, moral values, and individual standards by providing opportunities for students to make community contributions. Arts education cultivates creativity, helping students contribute to a healthy and vibrant community in which they are producers as well as consumer of the arts” (Cho 1-3) After reading many examples of service learning projects my mind was changed and I was sold on the idea. I read about community art shows, working with car shows, painting large neighborhood murals, and then it all made sense. There is so much more to service learning than I ever thought.

Service Learning in Action

My first attempt at service learning in the art room was having students create bandanas for shelter cats and dogs to wear to help them get adopted. We called them adopt me bandanas. There is a great deal of discussion I hear at my school depicting neglect and abuse of animals. This goes for all animals including wild animals, farm animals, and even household pets. I wanted to bring compassion into the hearts of my students concerning animal welfare. My ultimate goal was that my students would walk away from this experience having learned about the over population of animals in shelters, and that animals are sentient beings that deserve respect and compassion. I partnered older and younger students together for this project. My reasoning for this was the older students would learn that those younger than them are

capable of bringing ideas as good as theirs to the table, and that the younger students would learn that they can contribute as much to a project as the older students.

The two classes I chose to partner together for creating adopt me bandanas were a fourth grade and kindergarten class. Mrs. B.'s Kindergarten class is made up of 24 students; fourteen girls and ten boys. Mrs. C.'s fourth grade has 26 students; thirteen girls and thirteen boys. Although there are fourth grade and kindergarten classes that work together on a regular basis in my school I did not want to choose classes that have already partnered together as buddies. The dynamic of those partnerships is more of the fourth graders helping and teaching the kindergartners, not one of equality, which is the dynamic I wanted for this lesson. The two classes met together for two sixty-minute art periods, and separately for a follow up lesson. For the follow up lesson, the students created frames for photos of the dogs wearing their bandanas. They appreciated having something tangible to take away from this experience. The follow up lesson allowed me to discuss the outcome of the project with the students while it was still fresh in their minds.

On day one of the activity I introduced the idea of over population of animals to the students. I told them what an animal shelter was and we discussed the different types of shelters. I gave a brief history of the Humane Society and explained that the Fairfield area Humane Society was a no kill shelter that helps animal find a home.

After our discussion, I partnered up the students with whom they were going to create their bandana. Most partners were one 4th grader and one kindergartener, however, there were more fourth graders so some worked in groups of three. I had the students discuss with each other

what they knew about shelters and prepare at least one question for the visitors we were going to have from the shelter. We then shared our questions with the class to decide which ones we were going to ask.

The director of the shelter and the animal welfare officer then visited us with two of their rescue dogs Mac and Daisy, a Great Dane and Rottweiler/pit bull mix. They discussed the shelter with the children, why there are so many shelter animals and why it is important to get your animals fixed. They also talked about how to take care of your animals especially in the winter months, and why some animals need to be taken away from their owners. They then held a question and answer session with the students for the several questions we prepared ahead of time. When the question and answer session was over the children had the opportunity to pet the dogs. This was by far the children's favorite part. After our guests left, the students had a few minutes left to sketch down some of their ideas for their bandanas in preparation for the next week.

On day two the students found their partners and chose a workspace in the room. We had a quick review about what we were doing and why. I quickly explained the materials they were able to use to decorate their bandanas: puffy paint, fabric markers, ribbon, fabric scraps, fabric glue, and of course the actual bandana. The students received their sketches from the previous class time and all picked a number out of a hat. This number was the order in which they chose their bandana size and color. The students chose their bandanas in number order and got straight to work.

There were many kindergarteners that seemed timid at first but the fourth graders were very

encouraging and asking them about everything before they did anything. Most kindergarteners were even asked by their partner to choose the bandana color. The fourth graders were very good about keeping the kindergarteners involved. They helped them control the puffy paint, helped them spell words and encouraged them to do most the work. There were a few fourth graders that seemed to be taking control, but with the slightest encouragement from me quickly shared the execution with their kindergarten partner. It really turned out to be a fantastic experience for everyone involved and all the kids were very proud of what they had done.

On the third day the classes came separately during their normal art times. We had a small class discussion about how they liked making the bandanas and partnering with other kids. We talked briefly again about why it is so important to help shelter animals and to adopt when possible. I then told the students that I wanted them to all have something to take home to remember their experience. I let them know they were all going to receive a picture of some shelter animals in their bandanas and create a frame for it to go in. This was a fun project where the students had free creative control of their art. I supplied the students with thin white cardboard with a hole in the center, glitter glue pens, craft foam, tempera paint, patterned paper, markers, crayons, colored pencils, scissors, construction paper, and glue. The students traced a cardboard piece cut slightly smaller than the picture onto their cardboard where they wanted the picture to go. Most traced it right in the center, but some were purposely off center or even tilted. The students then cut the window for their picture starting at the hole I created and decorated their frames however they wanted, using any of the materials offered. I was so proud of the creativity the students displayed while making their frames. The students were very happy with the outcome of their bandanas as well as their frames. After I took the picture of the animals in the bandanas with the

director of the shelter, I attached a photo to each student's frame with a backing to hold it all together.

While most everything went smoothly when planning and executing the "Adopt me Bandanas" there were a few minor set backs, as to be expected. There was a short moment of chaos in the art room when the students first started decorating their bandanas. The puffy paint came out a lot faster than the students, and I, thought it would. A few students were crying because they thought their bandana was ruined until I gave them an extra one. One little girl even managed to get puffy paint on her dress despite her paint smock. Unfortunately, it was grandparents' day so all the kindergarteners were dressed up in nice clothes. If I were to do this again I would make sure there were no other special activities going on that day and send home a note asking parents to put their child in old clothes that are okay to get paint on because we are using products meant to stain fabric in art class. I also would do a quick demonstration with the new materials and have all the kids do a test squeeze on a scrap of fabric to get the feel for the paints. I only explained how to use the paints and did not have a demonstration. This was a mistake I will never make again.

Even with a few slight hiccups, the adopt me bandana project was extremely successful. The end results of the bandanas were fantastic, the students had fun, the shelter was happy, and the students learned a lot through this experience. I don't think I have ever received more excited questions about a project before. The students brought in sketches they did at home with out even being requested to do so. They asked me about the lesson in the halls, and some even visited the shelter after the animals received their bandanas to see them being worn. The

excitement and joy my students felt when helping others and working together was more than I ever could have imagined.

On the final day of the lesson I asked my students some questions while they were creating their picture frames.

1.) Did you learn something about shelters?

2.) Did you learn something about kindergarteners/forth graders?

3.) Did you learn something about animals?

4.) Did you learn something about yourself?

I received many answers that truly demonstrated the impact this experience had on them. Many forth graders said, *“Kindergarteners are way smarter than I thought they would be”* and *“Kindergarteners had better ideas than me!”* In regards to the shelter animals I heard; *“I learned how many animals didn’t have homes,” “I didn’t know animals could get taken away”* and *“I didn’t know some people weren’t nice to animals.”* Lastly, one very insightful Kindergartener stated, *“I learned I can make things to help.”* That statement alone was enough for me to know that I needed to make service projects an integral part of my curriculum. Even months later students are still talking to me about this experience. I quite often have students asking if we are going to do something for anyone else this year. Due to the excitement about what we did in the fall I found it necessary to learn more about how the participating students felt about our experience. I wanted to learn to what extent this experience had impacted the participating classes.

Data Collection and Results

In order to gather the information I desired, I chose 6 students who participated in creating adopt me bandanas to conduct a focus group with. My focus group consisted of three kindergarten and three forth grade students representing a diverse sample of my student demographics.

Ava is a Kindergartener and a very creative girl. She has amazing artistic abilities but lacks in social skills. She has a great imagination and tells fabulous stories but often forgets where she is going in a conversation and talks about something else. I was very interested in hearing how she remembered this event and what she was able to tell me about it.

Leo is a Kindergartener who has trouble focusing on specific tasks and struggles with fine motor skills and his academic work. He quite often is a behavioral problem but really seemed to enjoy working with a partner for this project.

Gabe was my last Kindergartener. He is a gifted artist, with an artist for a father, and is academically advanced. He is a fantastic student who is always on task and goes way beyond my expectations of any project. He is also very articulate for a 6 year old.

Jacob is a 4th grade special education student gifted in visual arts. He is quite often in trouble in school and may have a hard time getting along with others, however, he feels very successful in art class.

Lydia is a 4th grader who is new to our school this year. She came from a district that had a very different type of art class than the way I teach. She is average in her art abilities. She gets along well with all the students and is a hard worker.

Katherine was my last 4th grader. She takes part in the gifted and talented program. She is

extremely disciplined and is an amazing worker. She is extremely articulate and very intuitive. She is average in her artistic abilities and I felt she would provide great insight into the project.

I learned many things from having the focus group. Among these things were that every child involved would love to do another service project, but working with people they already know from different homerooms. I also learned that all the students felt good about helping the animals. They enjoyed being able to create something for someone else, and not just for themselves. During my focus group I gathered all six students together to hold a group discussion. I asked the students a series of eight questions.

- 1.) Please tell me about your experience creating adopt me bandanas for shelter animals.*
- 2.) How did/do you feel when you think about the experience of creating the bandanas?*
- 3.) How did you work with your partner?*
- 4.) How was this project different from the other projects we do in art class?*
- 5.) What do you like/not like about these differences?*
- 6.) What new things did you learn from this experience?*
- 7.) Did you have a favorite part of the lesson? Please tell me about it.*
- 8.) Would you want to change anything about the experience? Can you explain?*

At first I tried to hold the discussion in a more casual format where everyone could talk freely but quickly realized there were two students dominating the conversation. Although I was getting good feedback from those two students I wanted to hear from everyone so I started

asking each student to answer the question individually and then allowed them to respond to each other. This method worked wonderfully and everyone participated. After collecting and reviewing my data I found there were three main areas that resulted in the most useful information for future projects.

How the students felt while working:

“I felt like a real live artist” Lydia

“I felt like a fashion designer” Katherine

“I felt excited because we were getting help for the dogs” Jacob

“I was excited to work with someone else” Ava

“I was confused because it was so different than what we usually do” Gabe

What the students felt they learned:

“I learned that we can help animals get adopted more” Jacob

“I learned that when you help people you can actually feel good. I never really believed that”

Katherine

“I learned that you can just be yourself and draw” Lydia

“I learned that art can help people. I never knew that” Katherine

“I learned that you can save animals better” Gabe

“I learned that you can help dogs” Leo

“I learned that you can help animals (with art)” Ava

How the students were inspired:

“I want to make top hats for dogs” Gabe

“I would like to make cowboy hats for dogs” Ava

“Shirts for dogs!” Jacob

“It makes me want to make more things for animals. I got a sewing machine and I want to make outfits for my dog” Katherinne

“It makes me want to make more art to help people” Katherinne

“Make trampolines for dogs so they can jump straight up!!!” Gabe

“We should make art and give it for a donation to foundations for stuff” Lydia

I was pleasantly surprised while conducting my focus group to still hear my students excited about something we did so long ago and trying to think of other things they can do to help; even if it is making cowboy and top hats for dogs as Ava and Gabe stated.

Conclusion

Prior to this experience I had always considered myself to be a worldly thinker. I have volunteered at the local co-op, donated food to pantries, started a recycling program at my school, regularly donate money to many organizations, volunteer time tutoring children, and

generally try to think with the future in mind vs. in the now. I feel helping those less fortunate than yourself is an extremely important thing to do, however, I had never tried to bring that into my lesson plans before. The most worldly lesson I had ever done was recycled art. I always thought of service learning to be something good for classroom teachers who see their kids all-day and everyday. I never thought it could work for me considering I only see them for forty-five minutes once a week. I let this extremely important part of my personality fall to the wayside. I thought service learning had to be food drives, feeding the hungry or volunteering time. I never tried to think about how the arts could be involved and all the wonderful things you could do for others and the community.

My eyes were opened to a new world of teaching through this experience. At first I thought service learning in art class was a waste of time. I felt there was no place for service projects in my art curriculum, now I know the value of service learning. I learned the arts can easily become a huge part of service and community projects. I have already scheduled a local artist to create community art with LU-T students in the spring. Students from kindergarten through fifth grade will be working together to create two murals for the school library out of recycled bottle caps and twenty freestanding pieces for local businesses. I also plan to organize a community activity where students from the community work with high school, middle school, and elementary students to create a large mural for the town hall. I have been looking for charities to raise money for through art auctions such as cancer foundations and animal sanctuaries. I feel it is extremely important for my students to create art that can help make a change. As Sonja BasSheva Mañjon, Ph.D. states, “By offering programs in which our students engage in community development and activism through an artistic context, we not only strengthen their

capacity to become involved citizens, we unleash the power of art and creativity in local, national, and international environments.” (Mañjon 10-12) The possibilities are endless and I am discovering creative ways to implement service learning and community art into my curriculum everyday. I was thoroughly impacted by this teaching experience and am a true believer that the arts can greatly benefit from service projects and service projects from the arts.

Chapter 3: Talking About Art

Introduction

In this paper I will be discussing my experiences integrating art criticism and critique into an elementary art curriculum. Over the last two school years I have added student led critiques and analysis of both professional and student created art into my lessons. I have had many successes with these integrations and plan to incorporate these ideas into lessons I teach to all grade levels in the future.

Prior to taking the course *Critical Dialogue About Art and Aesthetics* in the winter of 2010, I was sure that I taught all the necessary aspects of a rich and meaningful art curriculum for young children. I taught art history, basic art making skills and techniques, and lessons that had my students expressing their feelings through their creations. I never thought art criticism and critique was something a young child would be successful partaking in. After my first integration of critique into my curriculum, I quickly learned the depth of thought children are capable of. I was amazed at the insight a young child was able to have in regards to why an artist made a work, or how they may have felt while creating it.

Acrostic Art

The first lesson I taught that included analyzing and responding to an artwork was a third grade lesson entitled *Acrostic Art*. For this lesson I held a class discussion about three very different paintings: Grant Wood's *American Gothic* 1930, Gustav Klimt's *The Kiss* 1907-1908, and Joan Miró's *People and Dog Under Sun* 1949. Each of these three pieces depict two people, however,

are executed with extremely different styles. I chose these pieces because I wanted the students to see the range of styles artists use even when painting the same subject.

We started our discussion by pointing out the similarities and differences in these works of art. This was the simple introduction to discussing art that the children needed. It was easy for them to describe the visual qualities of each painting and gave them the confidence to raise their hand. I received answers such as “They all have people,” “They all have more than one color,” and I was particularly impressed with “They all have patterns” to describe their similarities. Of course describing how they were different came extremely easy since each of these paintings uses a very different style. After the students became comfortable with the discussion, I moved onto more complex questions. I asked questions that really made them think, reason, and use their imaginations. I was blown away by the answers I received from such young children. This was especially true knowing the discussion we were having was more than likely the first time these children have ever been asked to analyze a work of art. The following are examples of the answers I received.

Why do you think the artists used such different styles?

“Art is about expressing yourself through paint and stuff. They feel different so they express themselves different.”

“They wanted to express different emotions so they had to use different styles.”

How do you feel when you look at these paintings?

“*American Gothic* makes me feel free because farms are always big and free land where you can

have freedom.”

“*The Kiss* makes me feel uncomfortable because it’s not everyday you see people kissing.”

“*People and Dog Under Sun* makes me feel curious about what he was thinking. Why is the person upside down?”

“*American Gothic* makes me feel safe like I’m at home because I live on a farm.”

How do the people in the painting feel?

“In *People and Dog Under Sun* the people feel dizzy because all the blood is rushing to their heads.”

Where do you think the people in the paintings are headed?

“In *People and Dog Under Sun* the people are going to go to Shafner’s (a local ice cream shop) to get ice cream to cool off from the hot sun.”

“In *The Kiss* the people are going to go on a date to get pizza.”

“In *American Gothic* the people are going to bail hay and feed the pigs.”

“In *American Gothic* the people are going to rest on the couch because they finished a long day of work.”

After the class discussion I had the students write an acrostic poem about one of the three paintings using the title of the painting as the first letter of each line. The students had to describe how the painting made them feel, how the painting looked, and the people in the painting. The poems allowed the students to spend more time reflecting on the paintings and to really express what they felt the painting was about.

The following are example acrostic poems.

The Kiss

The boy was romantic

He loved her

Enchanted in many different ways

Kissing him is what she loves

It makes me feel protected

She is romantic

She feels excited

American Gothic

American Gothic is cool

Made a lot of paintings

Entertaining and creative

Read for farming

Incredible and famous

Calm and fantastic

A creation on a farm

Not Goofy

Great to look at

Outstanding and farm like

The land is beautiful

How does the artist make his painting look real?

It has a girl and a boy

Congratulations your painting is groovy!

People and Dog Under Sun

Playful, peaceful,

Energetic,

Ow'somely cool,

Purple, blue, red, green, yellow and black,

Lots of fun.

Each mark beautiful,

A lot of abstract,

Not a tear of sad a tear of happy,

Do make me want to play in the sun,

Do make me want to go to my happy place,

Oh so wonderful,

Good enough to be true,

Unique

No Sadness,

During summer I think,

Enough fun,

Run, run, run,

So Peaceful,

Under the su...

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The first time I taught this lesson in the Winter of 2010 it went well, although it must have been obvious to the students I was not totally comfortable with it. I stumbled over my words, kept referring to my lesson plan, and didn't seem to have the same enthusiasm leading the discussion as I normally have when introducing a lesson. This was such a different experience for me and I was terrified it would be a failed attempt at something new. I taught the same lesson three more times that year and each time it was easier, went more smoothly, and the students enjoyed it more. The following year I was confident in the lesson and had a fantastic time teaching it. My students had meaningful conversations with each other and built on each other's statements. Not everyone felt the need to raise their hand, yet no one talked over each other. It truly was a discussion and not just individuals answering questions.

I love the dynamic this lesson creates in my room. The students feel like equals and you can tell they feel proud when they say something that others agree with. I intend to add similar lessons into each grades curriculum in years to come. I have started regularly asking my classes questions such as “Why do you think the artist made his/her artwork look like this?” while introducing a new work. The answers I receive now, versus at the beginning of the year, have proven to me that my classes are ready for more in depth analysis of art.

Student Feedback

I recently conducted a focus group interview with four third grade students in order to see how the students felt about this new type of lesson. While interviewing the students I found they all enjoyed talking about and interpreting the works of art and all of them would like to have more days when we discuss art. One student even suggested we do this with student art and all but one student agreed. The one child that was not excited about this idea said she would love to talk about other students art, but not her own. She stated that she is still sometimes embarrassed to share her work if she isn’t sure it is really good. I loved that another student responded, “It’s okay to express your feelings it’s not like it’s going to be on worldwide TV.” What a great response to try to make her friend comfortable.

When the students were asked what it was that they liked about the discussion one student answered “We got to express ourselves... It was good because not that much do I get to say what I really want to say.” This statement made me realize just how important it is for me to continue with similar lessons. Children need the opportunity to express their feelings and know it is okay to do so. Too many times children are told how they are supposed to feel, when they really

should be taught how to critically think and form their own educated opinions. Having lessons where the students are asked what they think, and told ahead of time there is no right or wrong answer, will do exactly that.

As we were talking the students began to express their thoughts on why it is okay if you don't like a piece of art. I was very surprised and excited to hear that my students feel art is for yourself and your own opinion means the most. This is something I have repeatedly tried to teach my students and now know I was successful in doing. One student stated, "I don't care what people think. It may be just like one person but there are thousands of people in the world and someone might think my art is good." Another followed up with "It's your art so if you like it it's nothing but your art and you should like it, it doesn't matter who else likes it." Because of these statements I know that I have helped my students learn that doing what *you* feel is right is the most important thing. They have learned that it is not necessary to please everyone else all of the time, you get to decide what is best for yourself. This is such an important lesson for children to learn and one that I feel has been lost in today's education. This is especially true with the focus on standardized tests where everything has a right and wrong answer. The world is not black and white and the arts help these students learn that. There are many gray areas to life where you get to make up your own answers, what an amazing lesson.

We ended our discussion with the students expressing to me other similar projects they would like to complete. One student let me know that although she really liked talking about art, poems are "not really her thing" and she would rather have completed a more traditional art piece in the end. Another student then suggested, "Maybe we could redesign the picture the way you think it

should be after we interpret it.” This is a fantastic idea and one I think I will use in the future.

I find it wonderful to know that my art class has inspired my students and helped them learn that it is okay to be yourself. All too often children, and even adults, are too worried about people liking them and pleasing everyone else. I learned through this experience that I can help my students become more comfortable with who they are and validate their feelings and emotions. The simplest change in curriculum could have some of the greatest impact on my students and their emotional growth. Lessons such as this one will be occurring more often in my class. All children need the opportunity to feel important and in control of their own lives.

Gallery Walks

In my class I have always had gallery walks with my kindergarten, first and second graders. This is a time where my students walk around the room and look at everyone’s art at the end of a lesson. I previously used this technique to keep the students in their seats during work time instead of getting up to see what their friends did. I realized I was missing a great opportunity to get my youngest students talking about art. I turned gallery walks into so much more than they used to be. Now instead of simply looking at others art, the students look at each others work and tell them what they like about it. I feel that in the early elementary grades it is important to keep critiques of student work positive, therefore, I have each student start their critique with the statement “I like your picture because...” The students may compliment each other on whatever it is that intrigues them about a piece. I have heard statements from kindergarteners like “I like your picture because it has many beautiful colors,” “I like your picture because it makes me feel happy,” “I like your picture because your dog looks so abstract!” We have talked about the

different reasons you could like a work of art and made lists of descriptive words that can be used during gallery walks. The students really enjoy getting to see and critique each others work. After we have walked around, I have each student compliment their table-mates so even those students that received no comments during the walk will still receive some positive feedback. Quite often, I join in the gallery walks and compliment each students work in the class.

As with all new teaching methods, gallery walks needed practice to make them a success. At first gallery walks were a bit chaotic. The students wanted to run, some wanted to talk to as many people as they could and put no thought into what they were saying, and some didn't want to participate at all. Others got upset if no one talked to them during the walk and some would brag about how many people liked their piece. After a few times of leading by example, the students became more comfortable with the concept and things started to run smoothly. Everyone started to participate and the compliments became more thoughtful. The students really love gallery walk time now and are always asking if we are going to have one. I know this is a concept I will continue to build upon in years to come.

This simple change to my curriculum has had some of the greatest impact. There have been some amazing side effects to the gallery walks that I didn't anticipate in the beginning. The students now accept that not everyone may like their art and that it is okay. They understand that you can learn from viewing what others do and that everyone sees things differently. I think that gallery walks teach the children so much more than how to compliment art, they teach acceptance.

Student Feedback

I conducted two focus group interviews with students in regards to their feelings on the new gallery walks in my class. The first interview was with a group of four kindergarten students; two boys and two girls. The second was with five first grade students; three boys and two girls. Both groups stated they like it much better now that we do gallery walks and compliment each other's art. One kindergartener stated "I like it because it makes you feel good when you get to say nice things. It helps you not be a bully." Both groups talked about how complimenting other people helps you be a "bully buster." This is a term we use in our school when someone chooses to do something nice rather than something mean. Both groups talked about how some people have bad days and laugh at art, or say mean things, and they don't like it when that happens. They both referred to these actions as someone being a bully. I asked my kindergarteners how they would feel about someone trying to help them become a better artist by telling them what they could make better in their picture. One girl stated, "I wouldn't like someone trying to change my ideas because it is my art. That would make me feel sad and hurt my feelings, but I do like people trying to help me." The students concern about bullying and answers about constructive criticism reaffirmed my belief that it is best to have only positive critiques with young children.

To further investigate my students' feelings on constructive criticism in critiques, I brought this issue up to my third grade students. I asked how they would feel about holding critiques where other students suggest what they don't like about a piece of art and try to give advice to make it better. They all agreed it would hurt their feelings and they would not like it, but it could help

them become a better artist. I feel constructive criticism may be best left for middle or high school when the students may see it more as helpful, and less about being mean.

I was very surprised during my kindergarten interview when the students started to open up to me about what they don't like about gallery walks. Many of them admitted to hiding their artwork in the table if they felt it was not successful. They also stated that if they think their piece was unsuccessful they are embarrassed to share it because other people might make fun of it. I asked whether this had happened before and no one said it had happened to them, however, they have seen other people get laughed at. I have never personally witnessed this, so I want to investigate this further to see if there is anything I can do to avoid this from happening. I want my students to understand it is okay to try and fail. Every artist creates art they are not happy with just as my students do. I understand my students not wanting to share with the class a piece they are not happy with. I do not know what I can do to avoid my students wanting to hide a piece they are not happy with, but I feel making sure no one laughs at others work is a good start. Further research needs to be done to find a solution to this problem.

The interview finished with me asking the students what they learned from having gallery walks. All the students made comments like "I learned it feels good to be nice," and I learned complimenting other people is fun," but I was particularly impressed with two answers I received. One student stated, "I learned that not everybody can like your picture and if they don't compliment it you don't have to be mad, just compliment back to them and ask them why they don't like it." I find this both amazing to hear from a six year old child and also interesting because she stated earlier that she was not comfortable with the idea of people giving her advice

on her work. I assume her thought is that it is okay to hear criticism if you ask for it, but not if you don't. Another kindergarten girl stated, "I learned how to be an artist because of peoples artwork I saw. They help me get ideas and be a better artist." I love that even in kindergarten, students are able to recognize the value in seeing others artwork. This attitude could help lead my students to a lifelong love of learning and research.

I received many similar answers in my first grade interview as I did with the kindergarteners. One student said "It makes other people feel good and it makes me feel good," another stated "I like gallery walks all of the days because I like when people say nice things about my work... once when I did a picture everyone said 'wow I love it Matthew' and it made me feel like, really happy and I was like 'wow everybody loves it I should do that more often.'"

When I asked the students what they don't like about gallery walks I found it very interesting that the answers I received were about the effort others put forth in class. They all love seeing others work and complimenting others, however, the students I interviewed are upset when they feel others do not take try their hardest on their artwork. One student said " When I walk around and it looks like other people copy, I don't like it," where another stated, "I don't like it when I walk around and it looks like people were scribbling and stuff. They didn't really try and I think that is bad." I used to think this type of critical thinking of art didn't happened until a later age based on student observation. I have spent quite a bit of time trying to figure out at what age it is most common for students to became ultra critical about their own art. I have found in the past this most often tends to happen around the end of second grade or beginning of third. Because of this, I find it interesting for students to be so critical about each others art much earlier.

I was very impressed with my first graders ability to see how spending time looking at others artwork can make them a better artist, but I was even more impressed to hear how gallery walks have inspired my students to draw more. One first grade boy stated, “When I was in Kindergarten I knew that everybody was drawing good and I wasn’t that good of a drawer until in the first day of first grade I can draw more better because I saw what other people were doing and practiced.” Another boy followed up with “When I do gallery walks in art its one of my favorite things... I used to not draw that much at home but now at my moms house I draw all the time because people tell me nice things.” This was a side affect of gallery walks that I did not anticipate, but am very happy about.

I once again closed the interview with asking the students what they feel they have learned from gallery walks. The depth of answers from such young children was so impressive. One girl answered, “I learned that people can be spontaneous and passionate when I get to see other peoples art. Most people’s don’t look the same.” Then another student answered “Yeah, because if you look at other peoples art that they’re really good at, it’s like they are teaching you but there’s no talking or anything.” Even first grade children can learn to see and respect each other’s differences. They can learn from each other and recognize this is a valuable part of life. I am happy to have helped these students discover this. I know that gallery walks will continue to be an everyday part of my curriculum. Starting next year, I also plan to incorporate gallery walks across all my classes not just the early grades. I know this will prove to be beneficial to everyone.

Final Thoughts

I have learned so much from these new additions to my curriculum. I have learned how insightful young children are, how inspired they can be, how critical they can be, and how kind they can be. All my students want to help each other, they want to learn more, and they want to feel important.

The arts can provide so much to students. They give the students a voice they may not have elsewhere, they let them be themselves, they teach acceptance, and they aide in higher level thinking. This is something that all students should receive in their education, and sadly, often don't. Even if a child receives arts education in school, it may not be a rich curriculum that helps the child grow. I have witnessed art teachers that simply have their students create crafts and works that all look the same in the end. They don't encourage the children to make their own decisions or to take risks. This type of arts education only reaffirms to the students that everything has only one right answer.

As an educator of the arts it is our duty to teach our children how to be individuals. It is up to us to help them learn how to express themselves through both their art and their words. After including analysis and discussion of art into my curriculum I have now learned this was an important part of arts education I was missing. Just as one of my students said earlier this year, "The art room is the only place I truly feel comfortable being myself. I can say and do what I want and really feel, and no one will judge me. This is the best place in the world." Everyone deserve a place like that.

Chapter 4: Synthesis

Since the start of the Mostly Online Masters program I have learned so much about teaching art. In the beginning, I thought I knew it all and was so proud to share all my amazing lessons with my cohort. I thought no one taught quite like me. I thought my experiences in the program would only help me add to my already amazing curriculum. I quickly realized I was going to learn so much more than I thought I would. In the last two years I have changed or discarded nearly every lesson I used to be so proud of. There is so much more to art than I was teaching. I will review the main changes I have made, and what I plan to do, to more fully integrate my learning's into my curriculum.

Change of Heart

Service Learning and Community Involvement

I had never thought about service learning or community involvement being an important part of my curriculum until starting the art education masters program at OSU. I used to think there was no way I could fit service projects into my curriculum and still teach all the things I felt were important especially since I only see my students once a week for forty-five minutes. This was because until recently, I thought service learning was only feeding the hungry or picking up trash. I never thought of the arts integration that was possible. After the experiences I had this year I now know this is not at all the case. Sonja BasSheva Mañjon, Ph.D. says it best, "...service learning is not volunteer service or missionary work, but at best, it provides opportunities for students to engage in community service that is based in community development and social change." (Mañjon 10-12)

In the 2010-11 school year I had my students participate in two service learning projects. My first attempt was on a small scale when I had two classes work together to create bandanas for shelter cats and dogs. This lesson went so well that I wanted to do something on a much larger scale. “Well-coordinated service- learning projects enable students to make a personal connection with the community, one that is facilitated by the aid of the teacher, another student, or a community member.” (Cho 1-3) I wanted to coordinate just that. In May, I arranged a weeklong visit with a local artist that creates art from discarded items. The entire school worked together to create a 16’x32” mural for the school library and twenty-five freestanding pieces out of bottle caps. This was one of the most fabulous experiences I have had in my teaching career thus far. The students collected bottle caps for three months, cleaned them, and sorted them. My fifth grade students created drawings for the mural and first grade students did so for the freestanding pieces. When the visiting artist Michelle Stitzlein arrived to the school on Monday she gave a talk to our students and many community members on the importance of the three R’s; reduce, reuse, and recycle. My Monday classes traced projected images onto plywood. On Tuesday, we primed and painted all the pieces. From Wednesday through Friday I saw every student in the school. They all worked alongside other students, teachers, and members of the community. Parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, friends and spouses of LU-T staff all pitched in to make this project a success. Each student operated a drill and attached brightly colored bottle caps of various shapes and sizes to the wood pieces to create a work of art. Each class worked on pieces that other students may have already worked on. Not a single class started and finished a piece during their class time. This was truly a group effort; some classes met with other classes, some by themselves, but each class worked with many members of the community. At the end of the week everyone was so excited to see how the piece they worked on had turned

out. Some said it wasn't the way they would have finished it, but everyone liked the outcome. On the following Tuesday the mural was mounted to the library wall and the freestanding pieces were placed around the school while the halls flooded with people for an "Art Walk." The free standing pieces have been donated to local businesses such as photography studios, cafe's, pizza shops, the post office, and beauty shop to name a few. This project was especially meaningful to me because I know that although the elementary art program is being eliminated next year, it will live on through the pieces scattered throughout the community and the mural in the library.

I have now realized that my service learning lessons have been the most meaningful projects I have taught to date. I know that my students will never forget the bottle cap art they created in elementary school. They will never forget the feeling they had the first time they saw their art in the window of a store or the awe they were in when they saw the mural complete for the first time mounted in the library. From now on, I will make a point of having at least one large school wide project each year.

Giving up Control

I used to teach with the mindset that the lesson was mine and I had to control every aspect of it. I have given up so much control this year and my students are now quite involved in the evolution of my lessons. A perfect example of this is a parody lesson I like to teach using *American Gothic* as our inspiration. This lesson used to read:

1. Teach the history of *American Gothic*
2. Define parody and show parodies of painting

3. Review proportions of face
4. Have students create a parody of *American Gothic* with themselves and their favorite farm animal
5. Background must be same, clothes must be same, position of people and expressions must be same
6. Students will paint with tempera paint

As you can see I had total control over this lesson. This year I told the students how I have taught this lesson in the past. I suggested that I wanted them to have more control and asked them what they thought we should do. They still liked the idea of the favorite farm animal which did not surprise me as I teach in a farming community, however, they did not like all the other restrictions. We had a discussion about what a painting would need to have for it to be recognizable as a parody. We decided that as long as the background had a triangle shape in it and the people/animal were in similar placement it would still read as *American Gothic*. We also decided as a class it would be fun if the man figure was holding something, but it did not have to be a pitch fork. I allowed the students to use any material they wanted as long as I was told what they were using ahead of time so I could give tips I felt would help with the end product.

This new way of teaching was very hard for me to adjust to. I was afraid that if I gave the students more freedom they would not take their time and instead would take advantage of the freedom. I have learned that the exact opposite happens; the more freedom I give the students the harder they try. They have a sense of ownership they did not previously have and take great pride in their art. They try to see how far they can take a piece while still fitting into the restrictions. I love seeing the creative ways my students come up with to solve the problems I present them with. In the *American Gothic* parody one student chose to turn the barn into a

space ship that was beaming up the cow standing next to him. Another student truly copied the painting replacing the woman with a pig and the farmhouse with his house. Both results were fantastic and the students were very proud. They got to decide how it should be done, therefore, it meant much more to them than it would have if they were only following my steps.

This year I also had the students fill out project evaluation forms where they graded each project we had completed. The early elementary colored in smiley faces and starred the project that was their favorite. In first and second grade I also had them draw or write their favorite thing to do. This was to help me learn their interests so I could try to integrate it into future lessons. In third grade and up the students used a rating system and graded each project. They were able to comment on anything they didn't or did like and suggest a project they would like to do in the future. I realized this year I would never become a better teacher, and was doing the kids a huge disservice, if I did not allow them to critique what we were doing. I found out a lot about what I can change from these forms and even got some great ideas for future lessons. I will continue to have the students fill out evaluation forms and hope to always learn as much as I did this year.

Future Plans

I was inspired by many things taught in the OSU masters program and have applied all my learning's into my lessons, however, there is one area I need much more work on; assessment. My assessment is better than it used to be, however, there is much more I wish to integrate. This year I changed my rubrics and now tailor one to each specific lesson. I also give the rubric to the students at the beginning of the lesson so they know exactly what to expect.

My next step is to integrate process portfolios into my assessment. While taking the assessment

course I developed an outline for the portfolio system I wish to use in my class. I created student checklists, guidelines, evaluations, and forms for writing about and critiquing ones own work. I plan on using each student's favorite piece in an end of the year show. This was something I was unable to start this year and plan to do so over the next few years. I will first start this with the upper grades and revise my system to be appropriate for the early elementary.

Questions

I know there is so much more I have to learn. I want to know about teaching controversial artists. How do you approach certain subjects with young students? How can I give my kindergarten students more control over their lesson other than just allowing them to choose their materials? How can I have critiques in my class that allow the students to express what they think needs changed in a work of art without crushing my sensitive students? I have many questions and things I want to know. I will continue to rework my curriculum. I hope to soon have no more meaningless or filler lessons. There are many things to learn and many things to change. This program has inspired me to continue my education long after I graduate.

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